

Commissioner's Corner

Conservation is a Year-round Conversation

By Commissioner Chris Stearns, District 3



Although, we are quickly approaching the end of winter, and summer is still in the distance, it's never too soon to begin the conversation on water conservation. Often times, the idea of conservation can be misinterpreted and misrepresented. From the PUD's perspective, conservation is not the abstention of water use, but rather eliminating waste and increasing the efficiency of water use. Conservation not only protects and prolongs the availability of our most precious resource for future generations, but it also reduces the wear and tear on our infrastructure, which in turn can positively impact rates.

Water conservation is not for a state of emergency, but rather should be a way of life. There are many resources that can help you implement water-saving changes including the PUD's website www.ThurstonPUD.org. You can tackle those indoor projects like purchasing a new, more efficient washer or replacing a leaky toilet. According to the Washington State Department of Ecology, a leaking toilet can waste up 250 gallons a day, which is like flushing your toilet 50 times in one day for no reason at all. You can also strike up a conversation with neighbors about an alternating watering schedule for the summer.

If you're new to the conservation conversation, then I encourage you to explore and test out one or two new ways to conserve water that suits your lifestyle and is within your comfort zone. I assure you, even the smallest effort counts, even if it's as simple as starting the conversation.

About Commissioner Chris Stearns

Chris Stearns is the present Secretary of the Board and was elected to the Thurston PUD Commission in 2008. He is serving his second term. A long-time Thurston County resident, Chris is a retired Fisheries Biologist from the state Department of Fish & Wildlife and has served on the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission and worked with local tribes. He helped initialize critical work to protect salmon and steelhead habitat in the southern regions of our state. Chris was elected from District 3 and is honored to serve and represent PUD customers. He supports conservation of water resources within the County.

Thurston PUD Commissioners

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District 2

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District 3

Chris Stearns

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Thurston PUD
1230 Ruddell Road SE
Lacey, Washington 98503
(360) 357-8783
Toll Free (866) 357-8783
Fax (360) 357-1172
www.ThurstonPUD.org

Preventing Frozen Water Pipes and Meters

Frozen water pipes are inconvenient. Broken water pipes are expensive. It's less expensive to run your faucet regularly than to repair a frozen or burst pipe.

Although winter in the Pacific Northwest is mild in comparison to other parts of the country, we can still experience temperatures that freeze pipes and water meters. Winter is here and Thurston PUD wants to help continue to prepare you for freezing temperatures and avoid the hassle of frozen meter and pipes.

Before Freezing Weather

- Find the main water shut-off valve to your home. Show all household members how to turn it off in case of a burst pipe or similar emergency.
- The pipes most likely to freeze are those nearest an uninsulated wall, door, window, garage, attic, basement or along an uninsulated floor.
- Add insulation to exterior walls wherever possible and wrap pipes with insulation.
- Eliminate cold drafts near water pipes. Make sure all doors and windows to the outside are tightly closed, including those in basements and crawl spaces.
- Disconnect and drain garden hoses from outside faucets and turn off the connection to those faucets at the interior valve. Drain any exposed pipes. Insulate outside faucets and backflow devices with newspaper, rags or similar material, covering them with plastic and securing with string or wire.
- Winterize irrigation systems.
- If your kitchen or bathroom sink is located against an outside wall, insulate the wall and exposed pipes. Open cabinet doors to allow warm air to circulate around the pipes.
- Keep the doors to rooms where the pipes and water meter are located so warm air can keep temperatures above freezing.
- Cover foundation vents with foam blocks or cardboard.
- Your water meter is in an outdoor pit. Check to see that the pit cover fits properly and has no cracks through which cold air can flow.
- Letting a faucet fed by pipes exposed to extremely cold weather drip can prevent the water inside from freezing. Flowing water can still freeze but this method makes it somewhat more difficult for the water to freeze.
- Flowing water can also break up ice that has started to freeze inside pipes. Turn on the water periodically at all faucets that are exposed to cold air when outside temperatures have been below freezing for several days.



If A Water Pipe or Meter Freezes

If you see or suspect damage to your water pipes

- Call a licensed plumber for assistance.

If you see or suspect a frozen or damaged water meter

- Please call us at (360) 357-8783
- You will need to be home when we attempt to thaw the meter. This is to minimize any damage inside your house if any of your pipes have burst.

If there is no sign of damage to pipes or the meter, just a lack of water flow

- Leave the faucet open as you attempt to thaw the pipe that feeds it.
- Once water starts flowing again, open a nearby faucet to allow a small stream of water to flow through the pipes. Keep that small flow running until you correct the problem that caused the pipe to freeze – most likely cold drafts and a lack of warm air circulating around the pipes or meter.
- Never use a torch or any other open flame to thaw a pipe or meter.



The Value of Water Series: Assessing Completed Projects and Forecasting the Future

2018 was a busy year for Thurston PUD. 2019 promises to be equally as productive.

In 2018 the Thurston PUD Field Operations Team was very busy replacing aging infrastructure, and they were able to accomplish daily operations and maintenance on all 274 of our water systems. Our Field Operations Team is comprised of some of the hardest working experts in the water utility profession and as part of the PUD's commitment to our customers, they are on-call 24-hours a day.

2018

- The District spent over \$85,000 replacing well pumps at 32 different water systems.
- The Field Operations Team began a 2-year metering project that will meter all unmetered connections and is estimated to cost the District \$80,000 at the project's end.
- We invested over \$150,000 drilling new wells on existing water systems.
- By acquiring an experienced Field Operations Team, the district saved money by completing pressure tanks and plumbing work "in-house" on 38 different water systems. The overall cost was about \$35,000.
- We infused \$84,000 into water treatment for 13 water systems.
- For all of these projects, their labor costs were estimated to be \$74,000.



In total, for 2018, the PUD spent \$557,000 investing in, repairing and replacing components on our water systems. A full list of projects that were completed in 2018 can be accessed on the PUD's website at www.ThurstonPUD.org.

2019-2024

The PUD's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a six-year plan that identifies capital projects and equipment purchases, provides a projected planning schedule, and forecasts what our financial needs will be. It's a roadmap that evaluates where the potential projects will be in the future, at what time they will occur and an estimate of what they will cost. The CIP is further proof of our commitment to our customers, water systems and to the service of providing safe, reliable drinking water.

A full list of Capital Improvement Projects can be found on our website www.ThurstonPUD.org by clicking the [Projects](#) link at the top of the page.

“Project Help” Fund Keeps the Water on For Struggling Families

Historically, colder months mean lower water bills for PUD customers, but other bills like power bills go up as families try to keep their homes warm. Financial hardships do not discriminate according to seasons. For years, Thurston PUD has offered an assistance fund that helps low-income families keep the water running in their homes. The “Project Help” program allows Thurston PUD customers to contribute by making donations through their PUD bill. Your help is appreciated and all proceeds go to a family that is experiencing financial hardship. You can make a one-time donation or monthly donations.

Simply fill out the authorization form below and mail it back with your bill. If you have questions, please call us at (360) 357-8783.

I authorize Thurston PUD to bill my account \$ _____

One-time to be donated to the Project Help Fund

Each month

This authorization shall remain in effect until PUD receives written notification from me to terminate this agreement. I understand that if my account becomes past due, this authorization becomes invalid.

Name _____

Service Address _____

Customer Account Number _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Meet the PUD: Cathy Wise, Customer Service Representative

When customers call the PUD, Cathy Wise is one of the voices on the other end of the line. Cathy is one of the new employees hired from the expansion of our water systems. She has been with the PUD for nearly a year and has been an important part of the team that processes payments, answers customer questions, and submits service requests.

“I enjoy helping customers and the ‘family’ I have at work because I enjoy helping people,” she said. Cathy is very family-oriented and brings a familial mindset to work which creates a collaborative atmosphere.

In her short time with the PUD, she has learned more about water than she could ever imagine. She’s become especially well-versed in water quality. She’s also helped to train new customer service representatives.

When she’s not at work, she is equally as active. “In my spare time, I enjoy time with family, going to church and football,” she said. “I love those Cowboys.”



Cathy Wise

Customer Service
Representative

Stay Informed About Your Water Service by Updating Your Contact Info

Has your contact information changed recently? Did you recently get a new email address? We want to know! Having the most updated contact information in our system helps us to inform you about any outages or emergencies within your water system. At this time, our computer systems don’t allow customers to update their contact information online, but you can call us at (360) 357-8783 or email us at PUDCustomerService@ThurstonPUD.org. Call us today to stay informed!